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***Drawn Threads: Drawing as a visual methodology to enhance qualitative studies***

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***Abstract***

This paper is an analysis of the value that drawing can bring to a formal research methodology. It is based on a series of drawings that were produced to extend and develop a form of qualitative enquiry, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This analysis was conducted as part of a study of personal textiles that individuals retain and value beyond their practice use, solely for their sentimental or family historical value, termed, the personal textile archive. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used for analysing the individual experience of these textiles, and was found to be a methodologically sound, yet flexible and creative method of uncovering the data.

Phenomenological research methods are established as valid means to investigate subjective human experience, across a range of different subject disciplines (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Such an interpretative approach was found to be an effective method to discern and illustrate the themes that arise through the individual's engagement with their own archived personal textiles. However, a visual rather than a text-based method is investigated for

the supplementary value and illumination such an approach could bring to a qualitative study.

In this respect, drawing is explored as a practice-based method of visual inquiry to supplement and support the initial research analysis. Within this model of thinking, drawing is a means of embodied, visual enquiry, which can be used to produce an analytical and evaluative practice that offers further insights to the text-based analysis. Drawing from the final and completed artefacts is a method for making implicit aspects of the experience of their making explicit. The drawn exploration of the material qualities of a textile design enabled an increased understanding of the tacit expertise of the designer or crafts-person, through applied drawing expertise.

***Keywords: phenomenology, textiles, methodology, qualitative studies***

### ***Introduction***

This paper focuses on the use of drawing to enable the further interpretation and understanding of qualitative data. To illustrate the method, a case study is used to demonstrate how a research study can be augmented by drawing as a qualitative visual research tool, and to discuss the insights that arise through this approach.

The case study is taken from a research project which examines how socially significant textiles are retained and stored within the home, forming the personal textile archive. The personal textile archive consists of clothing and textiles whose primary use is no longer utilitarian; in the case of clothing these items are kept, but no longer worn. These textile artefacts are 'curated' by people within their homes, to form personally significant, yet informally stored and arranged 'archives'. The clothing and textiles within the personal textile archive are kept for their purpose as reminders of family or personal histories. The purpose of the research project is to uncover how these textiles within the personal textile archive are kept, and to understand the nature of their value for their 'archivists', and to formally express this value as research. This is to unlock the tacit, implicit knowledge that remain unarticulated between the textile artefact and its 'curator'. To test the question over whether drawing could be

used to sympathetically explore the possibilities of textiles, a combination of an interview analysis, a drawing analysis and a photographic analysis were used to gain insights into the experiential domains of the craftsperson.

### ***Phenomenological research***

Textiles and clothing are the most omnipresent of designed artefacts, (Schoeser & Boydell, 2002) and as such form both a common human experience and a uniquely intimate experience, through being worn directly on the skin. In this way textiles comprise an embodied experience, and their investigation requires research methods that provide an in-road to this inner experience. Embodiment describes the intersection between the emotional and the physical arenas (Ashworth, 2003) and is key to understanding the emotional response to the qualities of textiles including smell, touch, fabric handle and emotional ties. Such a context requires qualitative methods that are adaptable and sensitive to this affective engagement with textiles.

The research project's data set was created and analysed through a phenomenological methodology. Phenomenological methodologies have been designed to enable a "fresh, complex, rich description of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived" (Finlay, 2009). Within the literature, phenomenological research methods are established as effective tools for researchers to reveal and analyse the individual's subjective, inner-world. Phenomenological methods are also noted for their sensitivity to the context in which phenomena are encountered, and their flexibility as a research paradigm.

A phenomenological enquiry is one which is idiographic in nature, in order to allow an in-depth and purposeful understanding of a phenomenon on a case-by-case basis. This understanding arises through the analysis of the data, and its purpose is to grasp the nature of an experience prior to laying out the data for explaining it, without, "explaining, predicting or controlling" it (Valle and Halling, 1989).

A key facet of a phenomenological enquiry is the understanding of what Husserl, the 'father' of phenomenology, termed the natural attitude (Husserl, 1970). This is the taken-for-granted world, which we experience unconsciously

and without reflection. Through a phenomenological analysis in which we are both consciously aware of and responsive to an experience or phenomenon, we suspend the natural attitude and engage in a conscious, and reflexive way.

This in-depth analytical process allows the researcher to uncover and elicit rich data sets. The study followed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis protocols and recommendations, and complex data sets emerged which in relation to the ways in which the individual experienced their own personal sets of narratives, from family and personal historical events, through to cultural and emotional ties.

Within a phenomenological enquiry, the attention of the researcher is drawn from within their own subject boundaries and expertise, but left sufficiently open to allow the participant's experience to infuse the research area. The interviews followed a Standard Operating Procedure which set out a semi-structured interview schedule. The interviews were transcribed in full, and the interview transcripts were analysed for their themes, as is the recommended protocol for an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al. 2009). A series of semi-structured interviews were used, which were designed to enable the research data to expand and extend the expectations of the researcher, thereby allowing unexpected findings to emerge.

Through the process of conducting the analysis questions arose with regards to the ways in which a further method for visually analysing the artefacts, aside from the taped transcript of the text, could be used to augment the understanding of the object. Therefore, drawing was selected as a method for understanding and making explicit the tacit knowledge bound up in the production of an artefact, where it was a hand-made, crafts-based object, or in the post-consumption life of the object, that is, the life an object has beyond its practical use (Lury, 1996).

### ***The drawn textile – how textile designers use drawing***

Drawing has been identified as instrumental within the design process, at all stages from research to completion and as enabling practitioners to highlight and identify key aspects of the design process (Lawson, 2004). Drawing is an

established process of research and visual communication of ideas, within the art and design disciplines. As Steve Garner (2008) states, “drawing research is 'making knowledge'.”

In this case study, drawing is used as a means to render the expertise of the textile designer explicit, and for showing an interpretive response to a textile artefact. For the textile designer, the systematic delivery of design knowledge expertise occurs through the inherited practices of textile design: briefing, concept development, testing, design development, testing again, final resolution and production (Wilson, 2001). For the finished artefact, which has passed into use, ongoing, implicit questions about the density of a textile's structure and material, its surface qualities, and the elements which make up the design can be explored and defined through the process of drawing. In turn this exploration can be a form of reflexivity which promotes a deep awareness of the qualities of the textile artefact. Drawing has a long history as an established method of visual research for a range of disciplines, including design and engineering, fine art, anthropology, and scientific subjects. As Steve Garner notes, drawing is used in these fields as both a means to visually record and explore possible ideas and concepts, prior to further investigations, but is also used as a tool for “problem solving and problem finding” (Garner 2008).

Textile designers work in specific subjects such as printed textiles, knitted textiles, embroidered textiles and woven textiles. Drawing expertise is used throughout the research, development and production schedule, in innumerable ways, including collecting visual research, the process of developing design ideas and for completing design collections. Both traditional hand-rendered methods, such as pencil, pen and ink, and painting, and CAD based methods such as Photoshop and Illustrator, are currently employed by designers throughout the design and production processes. Drawing for visual design research in textiles is a process of analysing objects or motifs for use, and the selection of suitable drawing processes and techniques for articulating a coherent design sense within a textile collection. In this way, drawing is used for image gathering and development, and as both an analytical and procedural tool.

However, research into the ways in which drawing may be used to explore the textiles themselves is less readily available. As a textile designer with drawing skills honed over many years, it seemed that the expertise and experiential knowledge of drawing as a means for exploring a visual topic or motif prior to the design development process could be brought to bear on the interpretation and further understanding of textiles in their post-consumption phase. The design abilities of the practitioner, honed through many years of practice and research, can become instinctive.

As Lavery (2003) notes, methodology is not a prescriptive series of rules to follow, but must allow for a creative approach, which is both sensitive to the research context and a responsive approach which engages sensitively with the data. Phenomenological research has been proven to provide methodologically valid approaches for practice-based research in fields such as education (Van Manen, 1990).

Key to phenomenological analyses are the concepts of 'bracketing' and the 'natural attitude' (Husserl, 1970; 1982; 1989). The natural attitude is the everyday experience of being-in-the-world, in which consciousness is directed towards what Husserl (1970) terms our 'pre-suppositions' and 'pre-reflective expectations.' Through the process of bracketing the researcher suspends and sets aside their assumptions about the nature of an experience to allow themselves to explore a research question from afresh, rather than taking a teleological approach which frames the research question or data analysis in order to confirm a firm hypothesis (Van Manen, 1990). Methods of bracketing include writing down prior expectations of the research, before conducting an interview, keeping a memo pad throughout the both the research gathering, transcription and analysis (Smith et al. 2009). This is to ensure that the researcher approaches each piece of evidence from a fresh perspective (Aanstoos, 1986). Langdridge (2004) also recommends this process to as a method to provide ideas for further exploration between an interview's themes and theoretical links. The decision to explore drawing as a further method of visually analysing the textiles arose in response to such a memo.

Having taken an approach based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al. 2009) for the analysis of the research project, it was deemed necessary to investigate the possibilities that another type of experiential expertise – drawing expertise – could be used to understand and creatively interpret the textiles within the personal textile archive themselves. In this way, the expertise of the draughtsperson / designer was applied to explore the tacit expertise of the craftsperson / embroiderer.

Through a process of reflection, the researcher can link their area of practice to the area of research. As one of the primary visual methods of research for the textile designer is through drawing and photography, it seemed likely that this skill-set could have potential for transfer to a more established text-based analysis. Not as a means for replacing such an established analysis, but as a mean for sensitively extending or exploring the lines of enquiry that have become apparent through text-based interview analyses.

### ***Process***

The process of drawing enables one to become immersed in a visual subject, and to experience a sense of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992) whereby one is meaningfully engaged with a subject matter. As a phenomenological enquiry is one in which the subjective personal experience of the individual is recorded and analysed, in order to uncover their individual sense of an event or facet of their life, it seemed that there were parallels between the act of transcript analysis, through breaking down an interview into its themes, and visual analysis through selecting and focusing on areas within a textile through the medium of drawing.

Drawing is a way of connecting with these textiles, through using its potential to visually interrogate artefacts and its processes of simultaneously focusing and expanding an enquiry.

A series of exploratory drawings were worked up in a sketchbook, to explore different drawing processes and techniques, and the ways in which these could be selected and used to visually engage with the textiles within the research participant's personal textile archive. Most of the techniques that were initially

selected were rejected, as these were stylistically selected, from an aesthetically focused viewpoint in which variations in weight and flow of line, and tone and gradient of line were used creatively rather than hyper-factually or diagrammatically.

Ideas for areas to further explore arose from the text transcript. For example, in this case study the Richelieu embroidery which was left unfinished, with a hanging thread, was deemed of interest for visual exploration, directing the researcher to visually analyse and focus on this area.

For the purpose of exploring the textile artefact, the reason for creating the drawing was not to produce an aesthetically pleasing drawing, but to enter the world of the craftsperson through the singular focus on one aspect of the textile. Within this case study, 2 embroideries, a piece of Richelieu work (Figure 1) and a Crinoline Lady embroidery (Figure 2) were selected for visual analysis through drawing, for their emotional significance to their 'curator' or owner for their emotional significance and representation of a period of time.

As Crowther (2009) notes, elements of style and interpretation are invoked through the embodied physical process of creating a visual artwork, including drawing. The intention of the drawing was to simplify the detail, creating areas of visual focus, and exploring the physical, embodied nature of creating a drawing. For example, in the drawings created to examine the Richelieu tablecloth (Figure 3) and Crinoline Lady embroidery (Figure 4) the focus was on the process of filling in the design, in the style of the original textile, rather than on creating a reproduction of the tablecloth. In this respect, tacit knowledge, that is knowledge that is "bound up in the activity and effort that produced it" (Sternberg & Horrath 1999) was deemed to be key to understanding the significance of the textiles, as their construction represented a key point in the research participant's personal history.





Figure 1: Richelieu Work Embroidery



Figure 2: Crinoline Lady Embroidery

### ***Craft and tacit expertise***

The knowledge that crafts-makers acquire and express in the practice of their craft is often tacit in nature. This knowledge is multi-modal, and encompasses the embodied interaction between themselves and the physical and conceptual manipulations of media, materials, process and technique. Through the process of drawing, a clearer understanding of the skill and process of the embroidery process was accessed and articulated. Within fashion and textile history, techniques used within object-based analysis have become established as a means to investigate clothing and textiles (Taylor, 2004). However, tension arises through having a partial provenance to work with when attempting to

visually unpick and interpret these textiles; using drawing with another research protocol provides a contextual or interpretive addition to this knowledge.

For the research project a particular point of interest was the sense that something hand-made by a craftsperson had a special and intrinsic quality which precluded their disposal, even past their post-consumption life, whether these were made by the individual being interviewed, a friend, or a family member, even if these other people weren't particularly fondly remembered. As the focus in the study was on textile artefacts, these hand-crafted textiles were in the main embroideries, knitted toys and garments, crocheted items, and handmade lace.

***Benefits of this method: Drawing expertise and experiential knowledge***

Through the drawing process, specific elements became apparent in their importance, achieving prominence. The nature of the handmade articles brought a clearer understanding of the process that occurred in their making. In particular, the stroke of the pen, to represent a stitch, paralleled the slow, meditative process of embroidering.

Themes that arose included a sense of time passing yet suspended, through being immersed in the activity of drawing. Observations were made on the page as they occurred, and left for further analysis at a later date. For instance, one of the observations that arose during the process of drawing was an emerging sense of impatience as the drawing neared completion. This was paralleled in the interview data, in which the interviewee described how she would 'get excited' towards the end of an embroidery. Though this theme from the interview had been picked up within the interview analysis, experiencing it through the drawing enabled a clearer sense of how this impatience manifested itself.

Of note was the limited interest in attempting to use drawings as a visual transcription of the mechanically manufactured pieces of textiles. The lack of the 'human touch' imposed through the mechanical process of manufacture meant that possibilities for engagement were limited, and there was little insight to be gained from drawing these.

***Findings:***

The process of drawing as a visual analytical method brings a different perspective to the process of a qualitative interview analysis. A comparison of 3 analytical processes: photographic analysis, drawing analysis and interview analysis are illustrated below in Table 1 in order to list the differences and emphasised areas of focus each approach had.

In particular, as Table 1 shows, there are different qualities which arise through each method of analysis. For example, the process of drawing enabled an in-road to the embodied experience of the interviewee's embroidery practice. This experience was described through the interview analysis, but replicating the embroidery through an 'embroidery mark' in the drawing brought a greater understanding of the nature of this experience.

Themes within the interview analysis relate to the period of time and era that these embroideries represent, a period of incapacitation due to rheumatic fever when the interviewee was 20 years old. During this time, she was unable to climb her household stairs and was ensconced in her front room, by the fire, doing what she describes as endless knitting and embroidery. Though none of her knitting remains, two embroideries dating from this period were produced for the interview. Within the interview analysis, themes relating to temporality became apparent. This sense of time was expressed a long period in which normal life was suspended, when spent most of her time resting, and her wakeful periods were occupied with embroidery. This sense of time that was both occupied and suspended intertwined was described as being recalled as a merged time between the embodied experiences of being ill and producing embroideries.

Though linear drawing is a much quicker activity than producing an embroidered textile, the sense of time was one of the most noticeable aspects of completing the drawings. In particular, when drawing, there was a split between being acutely aware of time passing, and an accompanying sense of impatience for the completion of the task, with contrasting periods of time whereby the sense was of being absorbed within the task of drawing, and

consciously unaware of time passing.

The sense of 'filling in' was also apparent, in which the motif, proportions and design were already determined, and the purpose of the activity was to fill these in. In addition, a clearer understanding of one of the themes of the interview analysis, of impatience, was enabled. The interviewee describes feeling impatient to complete a design, excited as she neared the end of one, and wishing to move on to another. This was noted in the interview analysis data, but only through the process of completing the drawing was this fully realised and reflected upon, as a similar feeling of impatience to complete a drawing was experienced.

The embodied feeling of drawing the hanging thread, which represents the final stitch of her illness, felt emotionally poignant and particularly notable, as a means of finishing the drawing, as it was the last element to be drawn in. For the interview participant, this poignancy represented her return to wellness, and as such she described how this was the most emotionally resonant and important artefact in her personal textile archive.



Figure 3: Richelieu work drawing drawing



Figure 4: Crinoline Lady

Table 1: Comparison of photographic, drawing and text analyses

Textile artefact: Crinoline lady	Photographic analysis	Drawing analysis	Interview analysis
Fabric	Heavyweight bleached cotton or linen	Folded and creased from storage	Fabrics arriving with the imagery on, ready to fill
Colour	Saturated hues contrasted with browns	N/A	Choosing the colours for the silk threads as part of the 'design process'

Stitching	<p>Colour dominates</p> <p>Stitch styles vary</p> <p>Shine of thread</p>	<p>Varied directions and scales of stroke to represent different types of stitch</p> <p>Weight of line varies</p> <p>Fine quality versus heavy weight quality</p>	N/A
Process	<p>Stitch onto base cloth</p>	<p>Skilled quality of mark</p> <p>Need for concentration to achieve uniformity</p> <p>Filling in the space of a design</p> <p>Need to control line of marks to retain direction of design</p>	'Endless'

Time	Mid 20th Century	<p>Sense of time passing</p> <p>Impatience to complete</p> <p>Leaving areas unfinished</p> <p>Contrast between sense of time passing versus sense of time suspended</p>	Folded and creased from storage
Significance	N/A	<p>Skill noticeable</p> <p>Variety of type of stitch</p>	Representing a period of ill-health and recuperation
Textile artefact: Richelieu	Photographic analysis	Drawing analysis	Interview analysis
Fabric	Heavy interior weight cloth	<p>Folds and creases from storage</p> <p>Edges frayed</p>	n/a
Colour	<p>Beige cloth, brown thread</p> <p>Mid-century</p>	Black on white	n/a

Stitching	Solid stitching Last stitch with hanging threads noticeable Cut-through areas more noticeable	Directional stroke to represent running stitch Fine quality Repetition Last stitch with hanging threads noticeable	Running stitch and buttonhole stitch
Process	Stitch and cut work	Filling in the space of a design	'Endless'



Time	Mid-20th century	<p>Sense of time passing</p> <p>Impatience to complete</p> <p>Leaving areas unfinished</p> <p>Contrast between sense of time passing versus sense of time suspended</p> <p>Slowing down</p> <p>Visual interrogation processing</p>	<p>Representing a specific time – 1950</p> <p>Representing an era – 9 months of recuperation from illness and enforced rest</p> <p>Representing a location – downstairs near the fire</p> <p>Feeling impatient to complete</p> <p>Leaving areas unfinished</p>
Significance	N/A	<p>Feeling of completion set against incompleteness</p>	<p>Representing a return to health, due to incompleteness</p> <p>Most precious artefact in collection</p>

### ***Conclusions***

Designed artefacts within material culture can be visually interrogated and analysed using drawing as an interpretive method. This is useful as a way of articulating the original practitioner's expertise and knowledge, as a means for reflecting on the process of the designer, and as a way of exploring the designed artefact as it has aged and been used through visually exploring its wear and tear. In this respect, the drawing process naturally lends itself to investigating artefacts in their post-consumption phase, beyond their utilitarian

usage. Within this study, wear and tear on the textiles was minimal, even after 60 years, as the textiles had been carefully stored. However, the creased nature of the textiles, which had been kept within a chest of drawers, was noticeable in both the photographs, and where the creases had distorted the fabric.

Through removing extraneous detail, drawing allows a focus on one element at a time. This parallels the qualitative research process in which one theme is reflected on at a time, and giving it individual consideration to develop insights about each theme's quality. For example, on the Richelieu work the thread which was hanging down from the final stitch was equally visible in both the photographic and drawn images. However, removing the colour and other information made the thread more noticeable, and the process of drawing it made the finality of the stitch more evocative, in parallel with the described experience within the interview.

This paring down of the drawing process, enabling the drawing to achieve primacy as the point of private entry to the life-world of the individual shows how this approach can have value for a designer to support a qualitative approach.

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